

**U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Royal Gorge Field Office
3028 E. Main Street
Canon City, CO 81212**

CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION

NUMBER: DOI-BLM-CO-F02-2012-0073 CX

CASEFILE/PROJECT NUMBER (optional): COC-18025

PROJECT NAME: Sangre de Cristo Electric Association Emergency Powerline Maintenance – Bear Creek area.

PLANNING UNIT: Royal Gorge Resource Area, Arkansas River, sub region # 1

LEGAL DESCRIPTION: New Mexico PM, Fremont County, CO
T. 49N., R. 9E., sec. 13, S1/2SW1/4;
sec. 14, SE1/4SW1/4, S1/2SE1/4;
sec. 23, NE1/4NE1/4;
sec. 24, NW1/4NW1/4.
T. 49N., R. 10E., sec. 19, SE1/4NE1/4.

APPLICANT: Sangre de Cristo Electric Association

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION The proposed action, from Sangre de Cristo Electric Association (SDCEA), is to replace a total of three (3) power poles located on public lands authorized under serial number COC-18025, that have been determined to be rotten below ground level and are at risk of failing. The proposed action is located in Fremont County, CO, approx. 5 miles southeast of Salida, CO. This electric transmission powerline provides service to residents of Howard, Coaldale, Cotopaxi and Texas Creek, Colorado. This transmission line is the only electric feed into this area. These poles were known to be at risk of failing prior to 2012. SDCEA would like to complete the pole replacement as soon as possible (Fall 2014) before snowfall can potentially impact the structures.

Two of the poles to be replaced are in the same two-pole structure located in T. 49N., R. 9E., sec. 13. These poles are accessed off of Chaffee County Road 101/Fremont County Road 49 (Bear Creek Road) and through a locked gate onto an existing road crossing approx. 8,050 feet of public lands, authorized to the Western Area Power Administration (WAPA) which has an electric transmission powerline running parallel to SDCEA's powerline in this area. The access road will need some maintenance in one area that has been eroded to make it passable for SDCEA vehicles. SDCEA anticipates needing to use a small amount of material from within the existing 30 foot road ROW to repair the washed-out area (Photo 1).

The third pole is located in T. 49N., R. 10E., sec. 19, and is accessible off of Fremont County Road 45. This pole is within 50 feet of Fremont County Road 45.

All poles to be replaced are 60 feet tall wood poles, buried 8 feet in the ground, and all new poles will be the same size and same material. SDCEA will need to disturb an area about 2 feet wide by 10 feet long (approx. 20 square feet) for each pole replaced. A new pole hole will be dug around the existing bad pole. The new pole will be placed alongside the old pole and connected to the existing cross arm. The old pole will then be removed, and the pole hole will be filled in and compacted with the existing material. Pole holes will be dug with a backhoe or auger truck. New poles will be set with a boom truck and lines transferred using a bucket truck. Old poles will be removed from BLM lands.

PLAN CONFORMANCE REVIEW:

Name of Plan: Royal Gorge Resource Management Plan, Record of Decision

Date Approved: May 13, 1996

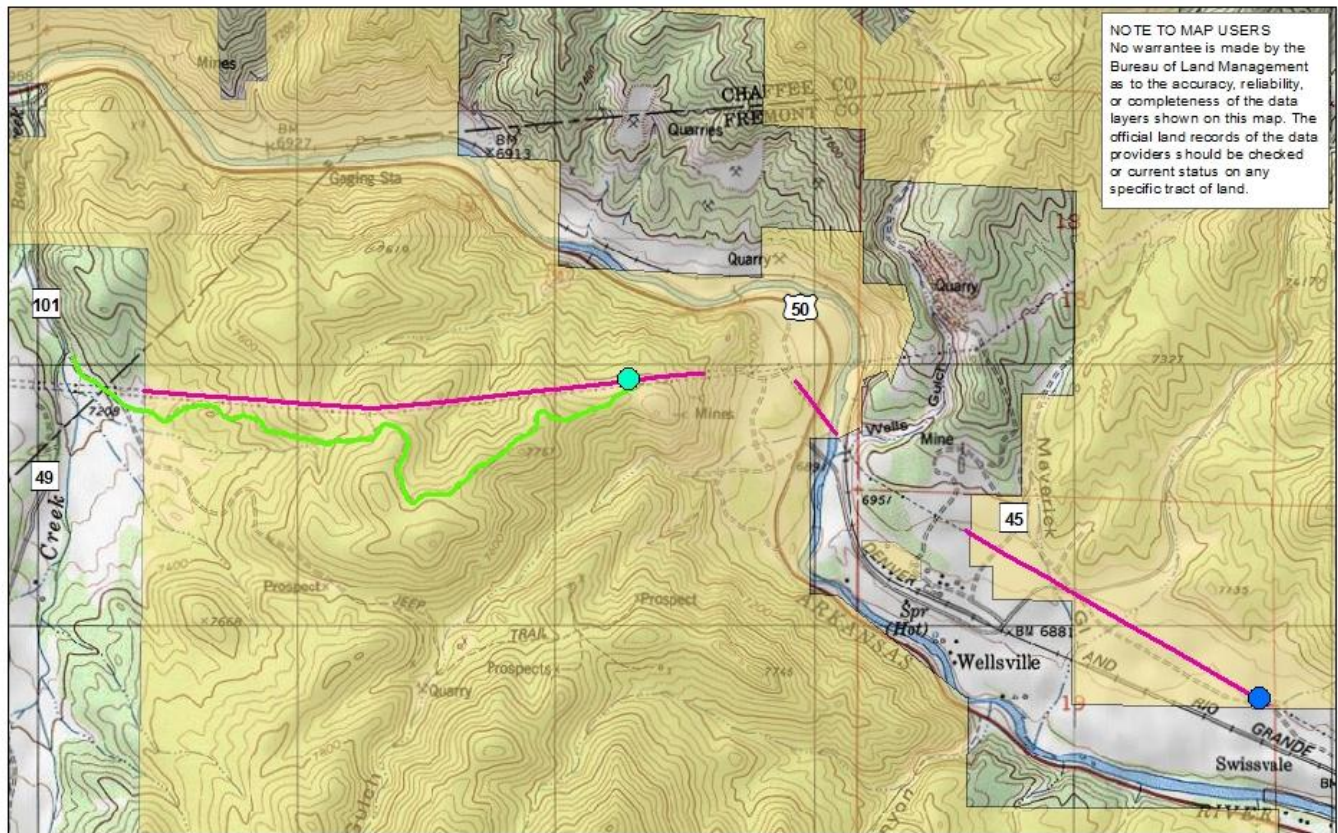
Decision Number: C-115

Decision Language: Allow local purpose powerlines, pipelines, communication lines and sites, and other types of rights-of-way only when a clear need is demonstrated, and the beneficial environmental effects outweigh the costs.

CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION REVIEW: This proposed action is listed as a Categorical Exclusion in DOI Departmental Manual Part 516 Chapter 11 I (1). None of the following exceptions in 516 DM 2, Appendix 2, apply.

Exclusion Criteria	YES	NO
1. Have significant impacts on public health or safety.		X
2. Have significant impacts on such natural resources and unique geographic characteristics as historic or cultural resources; park, recreation, or refuge lands; wilderness areas; lands with wilderness characteristics; wild or scenic rivers; national natural landmarks; sole or principal drinking water aquifers; prime farmlands; wetlands; floodplains; national monuments; migratory birds; and other ecologically significant or critical areas.		X
3. Have highly controversial environmental effects or involve unresolved conflicts concerning alternative uses of available resources.		X
4. Have highly uncertain and potentially significant environmental effects or involve unique or unknown environmental risks.		X
5. Establish a precedent for future action or represent a decision in principle about future actions with potentially significant environmental effects.		X
6. Have a direct relationship to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant environmental effects.		X
7. Have significant impacts on properties listed, or eligible for listing, on the National Register of Historic Places as determined by either the bureau or office.		X
8. Have significant impacts on species listed, or proposed to be listed, on the List of Endangered or Threatened Species, or have significant		X

impacts on designated Critical Habitat for these species.		
9. Violate a Federal law, or a State, local or tribal law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment.		X
10. Have a disproportionately high and adverse effect on low income or minority populations.		X
11. Limit access to and ceremonial use of Indian sacred sites on Federal lands by Indian religious practitioners or significantly adversely affect the physical integrity of such sacred sites.		X
12. Contribute to the introduction, continued existence, or spread of noxious weeds or non-native invasive species known to occur in the area or actions that may promote the introduction, growth, or expansion of the range of such species.		X



Legend

- Section_13_poles
- Section 19 pole
- SDCEA_C-18025_Line
- SDCEA_Bear_Crk_Access_Road

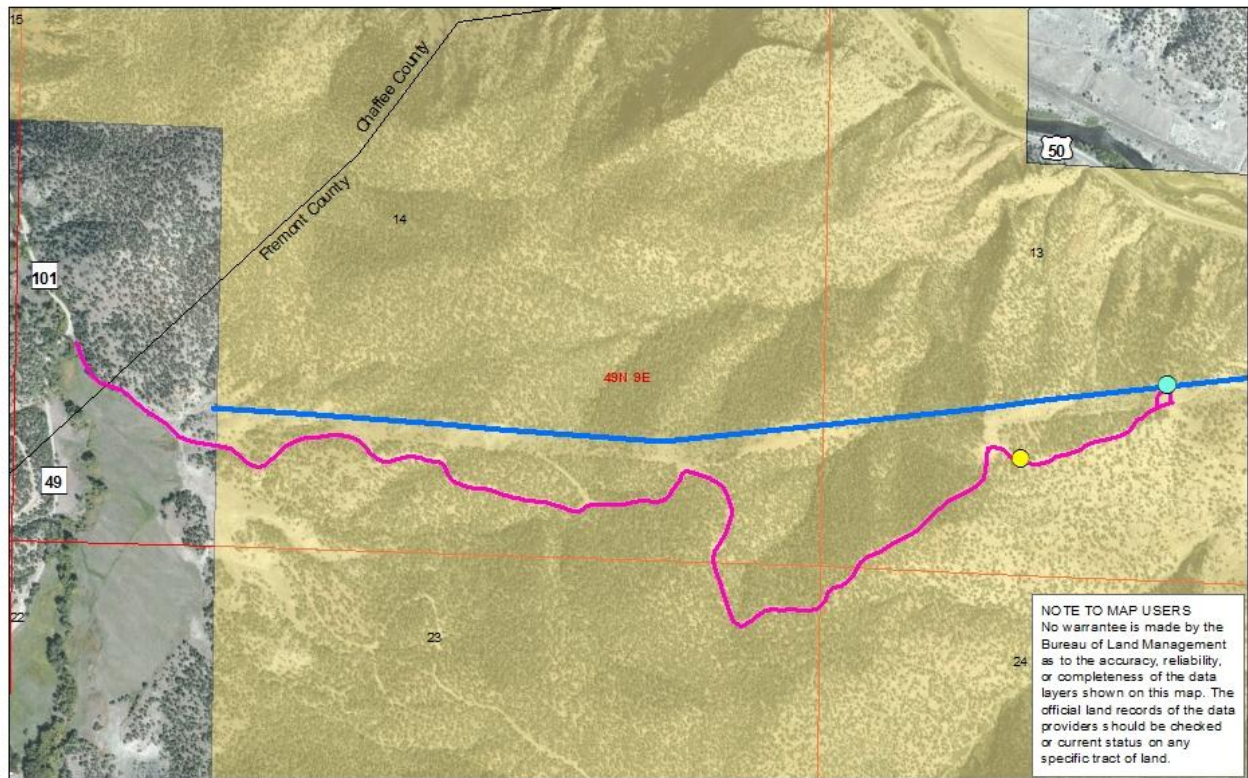
SDCEA Emergency Pole Replacement Overview

CO-F02-2012-0073 CX

NMPM, T. 49N., R. 9E., Sec. 13.
NMPM, T. 49N., R. 10E., Sec. 9.

0 0.25 0.5 1 Miles





- Legend**
- Section_13_poles
 - Approx. location of road repair
 - SDCEA_C_18025
 - SDCEA_Bear_Crk_Trans_Roads

Section 13 Emergency Pole Replacement and Access Route

CO-F02-2012-0073 CX

23PM, T49 N., R10 E., Sec. 13

0 0.1 0.2 0.4 Miles



Photo 1 Area of road to be repaired.



INTERDISCIPLINARY TEAM REVIEW			
NAME	TITLE	AREA OF RESPONSIBILITY	Initials/date
Matt Rustand	Wildlife Biologist	Terrestrial Wildlife, T&E, Migratory Birds	MR, 10/30/2014
Jeff Williams	Range Management Spec.	Range, Vegetation, Farmland	JW, 11/3/14
Chris Cloninger	Range Management Spec.	Range, Vegetation, Farmland	-----
John Lamman	Range Management Spec.	Weeds	JL, 11/03/2014
Dave Gilbert	Fisheries Biologist	Aquatic Wildlife, Riparian/Wetlands	DG, 11/3/14
Stephanie Carter	Geologist	Minerals, Paleontology, Waste Hazardous or Solid	-----
Melissa Smeins	Geologist	Minerals, Paleontology	MJS, 10/31/2014
John Smeins	Hydrologist	Hydrology, Water Quality/Rights, Soils	JS, 11/3/14
Ty Webb	Fire Management Officer	Air Quality	TW, 11/10/14
Jeff Covington	Cadastral Surveyor	Cadastral Survey	JC, 10/28/2014
Kalem Lenard , Linda Skinner	Outdoor Recreation Planner	Recreation, Wilderness, LWCs, Visual, ACEC, W&S Rivers,	LS, 10/28/2014
John Nahomenuk	River Manager	Recreation, Wilderness, LWCs, Visual, ACEC, W&S Rivers	-----
Ken Reed	Forester	Forestry	KR, 11/19/2014
Monica Weimer	Archaeologist	Cultural, Native American	MMW, 1/12/15
Michael Troyer	Archaeologist	Cultural, Native American	-----
Greg Valladares, Rich Rotte	Realty Specialist	Realty	GDV, 11/20/2014
Steve Cunningham	Law Enforcement Ranger	Law Enforcement	-----
Ty Webb	Fire Management Officer	Fire	TW, 11/10/14

REMARKS:

Cultural Resources: Two sites (5FN72 and 5FN1524) and an archaeological landscape (5FN2851/5CF2949) are present in the vicinity of the area of potential effect (see Report CR-RG-15-32 P). Although Site 5FN72 is eligible for the NRHP, there will be no adverse effect to the historic property if an archaeological monitor is present. BLM will attach the following stipulation to the Notice to Proceed:

“The holder will hire an archaeological contractor that holds a BLM permit in good standing to perform monitoring during any and all road construction and/or maintenance, and during replacement of the power poles. If subsurface cultural materials are discovered during the work, the archaeological contractor will have the authority to stop the work and investigate the discovery. If the archaeological contractor determines that subsurface deposits with good integrity have been disturbed, the holder will suspend all operations in the immediate area of the discovery until written authorization to proceed is issued by the Authorized Officer. The holder will be responsible for all costs associated with any additional identification, evaluation and resolution activities, pursuant to NHPA, that result from the work associated with the undertaking.”

Native American Religious Concerns: No possible traditional cultural properties were located during the cultural resources inventory (see above). There is no other known evidence that suggests the project area holds special significance for Native Americans.

Threatened and Endangered Species: Brandagee buckwheat (*Eriogonium brandegeei*) is a BLM sensitive species that is endemic to the Arkansas River watershed between Salida and Canon City. Populations are known to exist in the Bear Creek drainage. Surveys must be completed to document the presence/absence of buckwheat where project activities are expected to disturb vegetation (including road construction/maintenance work). Populations of buckwheat located must be protected to the greatest extent possible. There are no records of any other federally listed or BLM sensitive species within or near the project area.

Migratory Birds: To be in compliance with the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) and the Memorandum of Understanding between BLM and USFWS required by Executive Order 13186, BLM must avoid actions, where possible, that result in a “take” of migratory birds. Pursuant to BLM Instruction Memorandum 2008-050, to reduce impacts to Birds of Conservation Concern (BCC), no habitat disturbance (removal of vegetation such as timber, brush, or grass) is allowed during the periods of May 15 - July 15, the breeding and brood rearing season for most Colorado migratory birds. The provision will not apply to completion activities in disturbed areas that were initiated prior to May 15 and continue into the 60-day period.

An exception to this timing limitation will be granted if nesting surveys conducted no more than one week prior to vegetation-disturbing activities indicate no nesting within 30 meters (100 feet) of the area to be disturbed. Surveys shall be conducted by a qualified breeding bird surveyor between sunrise and 10:00 a.m. under favorable conditions.

Paleontological Resources: In order to prevent potential impacts to paleontologic resources, a stipulation will be attached to the ROW grant that directs the holder to notify the BLM RGFO immediately if any vertebrate fossils or their traces are discovered during operations within this ROW. Operations may continue as long as the fossil specimen would not be damaged or destroyed by the activity. Within 5 working days of notification, the BLM RGFO shall evaluate or have evaluated such discoveries and shall notify the operator what action shall be taken with respect to such discoveries.

Wastes, Hazardous or Solid: If the project involves oil or fuel usage, transfer or storage, an adequate spill kit and shovels are required to be onsite during project implementation. The project proponent will be responsible for adhering to all applicable local, State and Federal regulations in the event of a spill, which includes following the proper notification procedures in BLM’s Spill Contingency Plan.

Forestry: The forest type in the project area is pinyon pine and juniper which is considered a woodland and commonly referred to as PJ woodlands. Minor small tree removal and large tree pruning along the access route shall be allowed. No wood may be removed from BLM lands without the appropriate permit. If more than 5 large trees need to be removed then the BLM forester shall be notified and the power company shall purchase the fuelwood from these large trees.

Realty: The proposed road maintenance action is to an access road authorized to the Western Area Power Administration (WAPA) under serial number COC-0128242. The WAPA right-of-way also authorizes a transmission powerline that runs parallel to SDCEA's powerline requiring maintenance. WAPA was notified by letter dated 11/03/2014 and has issued no response to the proposed action.

MITIGATION:

Surveys for the BLM sensitive species Brandagee buckwheat (*Eriogonium brandegeei*) were conducted by BLM personnel on 12/02/2014. No populations of this buckwheat species were found in the pole replacement and road maintenance locations.

COMPLIANCE PLAN (optional): BLM will attach the following stipulation to the Notice to Proceed:

“The holder will hire an archaeological contractor that holds a BLM permit in good standing to perform monitoring during any and all road construction and/or maintenance, and during replacement of the power poles. If subsurface cultural materials are discovered during the work, the archaeological contractor will have the authority to stop the work and investigate the discovery. If the archaeological contractor determines that subsurface deposits with good integrity have been disturbed, the holder will suspend all operations in the immediate area of the discovery until written authorization to proceed is issued by the Authorized Officer. The holder will be responsible for all costs associated with any additional identification, evaluation and resolution activities, pursuant to NHPA, that result from the work associated with the undertaking.”

NAME OF PREPARER: Greg Valladares

SUPERVISORY REVIEW: /s/ James Annable for Jay Raiford

NAME OF ENVIRONMENTAL COORDINATOR: /s/ Martin Weimer

DATE: 1/14/15

DECISION AND RATIONALE: I have reviewed this Categorical Exclusion and have decided to implement the Proposed Action.

This action is listed in the Department Manual as an action that may be categorically excluded. I have evaluated the action relative to the 10 criteria listed above and have determined that it does not represent an exception and is, therefore, categorically excluded from further environmental analysis.

SIGNATURE OF AUTHORIZED OFFICIAL: /s/ Keith E. Berger
Keith E. Berger, Field Manager

DATE SIGNED: 1/14/15